NATION

Asaram gets interim bail in 2013

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BUSINESS

Adani Group stocks soar; Adani Power surges 20%

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SPORTS

Sindhu, Satwik have Super Open

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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India asks Russia to release war recruits as Kerala man dies

Another Indian is injured & hospitalised

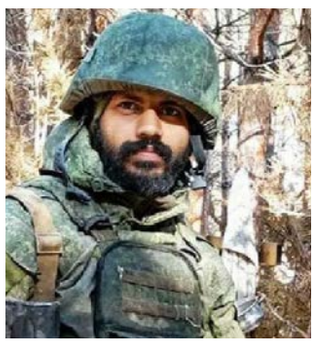
NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Indian government has called on Russia to release all Indian nationals recruited by its military after the death of yet another Indian in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, raising the toll to ten.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), confirmed that an Indian national from Kerala lost his life,

Binil TB, an electrician from Thrissur, reportedly died in the war zone after being stranded somewhere in Ukrainian territory now under Russian control. Binil's cousin-in-law, Jain TK, who accompanied him to Russia and was assigned to front-line service, was also injured. Jaiswal stated that the matter has been urgently communicated to Russian officials both in Moscow and at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi.

"We have reiterated our demand for the early discharge of the remaining Indian nationals," he asserted. Prime Minister Narendra Modi previously addressed the matter during discussions



Binil TB **PHOTO: X**

with Russian Presi-dent Vladimir Putin in Moscow last July, emphasizing the need for the safe return of Indian personnel.

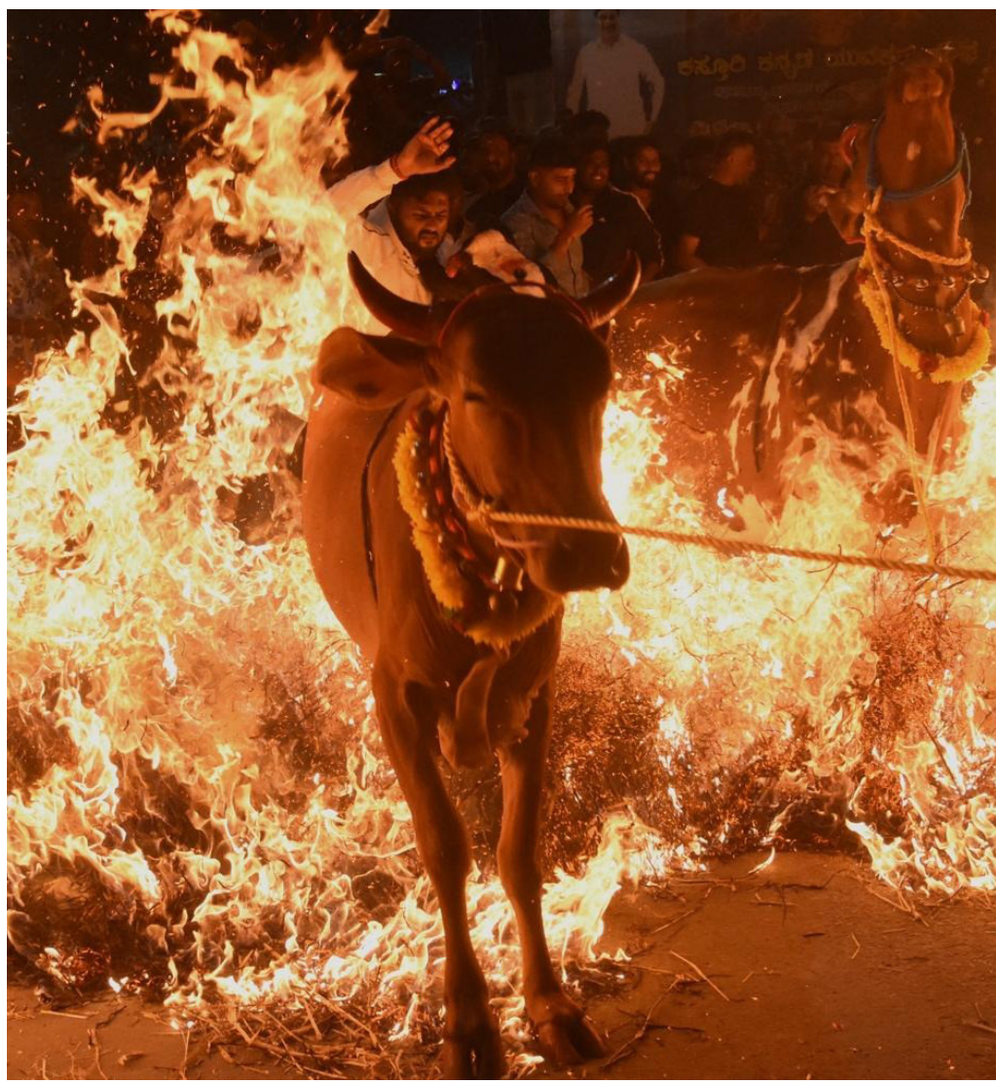
The deceased, identified as Binil TB from Thrissur, was reported to have died on the frontlines in Ukraine. Although the MEA did not specify the details of his death, it has been confirmed that another Indian national from Kerala, also recruited to serve in the Russian Army, is currently injured.

"We have received word of the unfortunate passing of an Indian national from Kerala, who had apparently been recruited to serve in the Russian Army," Jaiswal said. The MEA has extended condolences to the family of the deceased.

"Our embassy in Moscow is in contact with the families, providing all necessary assistance," he added. The ministry is working with Russian authorities to facilitate the transportation of the mortal remains back to India and the repatriation of the injured individual.

In October 2023, Indian officials reported that 85 Indian nationals had been discharged from the Russian military, with efforts ongoing to secure the release of an additional 20. The Russian Embassy stated last August that both Moscow and New Delhi were cooperating closely to expedite the identification and dis-charge of Indian nationals who had voluntarily joined military service. The Russian Ministry of Defence announced in April that it had halted recruitment of foreign nationals, including Indians, into its military. —*PTI*

JUMPING THROUGH FIRE



A bull jumps through fire during the 'Kichchu Haisodu' ceremony on Makar Sankranti celebrations in Bengaluru on Tuesday. This practice is meant to ward off evil and bring good luck and prosperity **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Parl panel summons Zuck for poll claim

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Seeking an apology for "tarnishing" India's image following social media giant Meta chairman's comments that India's ruling dispensation lost the Lok Sabha election last year, BJP MP and chief of Parlia-mentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology Nishikant Dubey on Tues-day said the panel will summon the firm's officials.

"My committee will summon Meta for this incorrect information. Incorrect information about any demo-cratic country tarnishes its image. This organisation will have to apologise to the Indian Parliament and the people here for this mistake," Dubey posted on X.

Dubey was reacting to Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's criticism of Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, who owns the controlling stake in the Meta group of companies, for making a "factually incorrect" statement that the incumbent government in India lost the election in 2024 over issues arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is disappointing to see misinformation from Mr Zuckerberg himself. Let's uphold facts and credibility," Vaishnaw said, tagging Meta on X and other social media platforms.

caption **PHOTO: X**

"From free food for 800 million, 2.2 billion free vaccines and aid to nations worldwide during Covid to leading India as the fast-est-growing major econ-omy, PM Modi's decisive 3rd-term victory is a testament to good governance and public trust," he said in the post. Appearing on the Joe Rogan podcast, Zuckerberg had said 2024 was the big election year around the world and in a lot of countries like India, the incumbents lost the polls. —*PTI*

There is no J&K without PoK, says Rajnath

AKHNOOR, 14 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the Armed Forces Veterans' Day function, at Akhnoor, in Jammu

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said Jammu and Kashmir is "incomplete" without Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), warning the neighbouring country against running terrorist training camps there.

Singh also accused Pakistan of making persistent attempts to destabilise India by sponsoring terrorism and warned the neighbour of consequences unless it dismantled its terror infrastructure in PoK.

"The land of PoK is being used to run the business of terrorism. Even today, terrorist training camps are operational there. Launch pads have been established in areas near the border, and the Indian govern-ment has concrete information about this and is fully aware of the situation. Pakistan must eliminate this, otherwise ...," Singh said while addressing a veterans' rally in Akhnoor area.

Reiterating India's position on PoK, he said, "Jammu and Kashmir is incomplete without PoK. For Paki-stan, PoK is nothing more than foreign territory."

The minister said people in PoK have been deprived of a dignified life, and Pakistan's rulers have exploit-ed them in the name of religion to further their anti-India agenda.

Singh also condemned recent remarks by PoK Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq, calling them a continuation of Pakistan's anti-India agenda nurtured since the era of General Zia-ul-Haq.

Hitting out at Pakistan's failure to abandon its policy of supporting terrorism, Singh said, "Pakistan has always made every effort to destabilise India.

It continues its efforts. Pakistan has never abandoned ter-rorism. The terrorists infiltrating Jammu and Kashmir come from Pakistan." —*PTI*

HAMAS ACCEPTS GAZA DRAFT TRUCE, HOSTAGE RELEASE

CAIRO, 14 JAN

Hamas has accepted a draft agreement for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of dozens of hostages, two officials involved in the talks said on Tuesday. Mediator Qatar said the negotiations were at the "closest point" yet to sealing a deal.

The Associated Press obtained a copy of the proposed agreement, and an Egyptian official and a Hamas official confirmed its authenticity.

An Israeli official said progress has been made, but the details are being finalised. The plan needs the Israeli Cabinet's final approval, the official said. All three officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks.

The US, Egypt and Qatar have spent the past year trying to mediate an end to the 15-month war and secure the release dozens of hostages captured in Hamas' 7 October, 2023, attack that triggered it. —*PTI*

Spanish consulate to be opened in Bengaluru soon

MADRID, 14 JAN

Spain will soon open a consulate in Bengaluru, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said calling it a "good sign" for deepening the relations between both the countries. Jaishankar, who is on a two-day visit to Spain, made these remarks on Monday while interacting with the Indian community here. "In terms of our people-to-people relationship, I hope the people of Barcelona welcome that we have a consulate there... There will soon be a Spanish consulate in Bengaluru," he said.—*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

BJP ACCUSES CM ATISHI OF VIOLATING MCC

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The BJP has accused Delhi Chief Minister Atishi of breaching the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by alleg-edly using a government vehicle for election campaigning. The party has called for her to withdraw her nomination for the Kalkaji assembly seat on ethical grounds. AAP filed her nomination for the upcoming Delhi elections scheduled for 5 February, with vote counting set for 8 February. BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri claimed Atishi's election office in Govindpuri had campaign materials transported using a vehicle from the Public Works. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

AFTER TEST DEBACLE

BCCI mulls limiting players' wives from staying on tours

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The BCCI is considering a slew of disciplinary measures in the aftermath of India's disastrous tour of Aus-tralia, including limiting the presence of spouses on tours and barring managerial staff of coaches and players from the team bus.

The steps which could be taken moving forward will limit the presence of wives and other family members on assignments to a maximum of two weeks if the tour is 45 days or more. If the duration is less than that, the presence of wives could be limited to a week.

In addition, all players might have to use the team bus and not any other vehicle when on assignments. All these measures were discussed during the review meeting of the tour

Anushka Sharma, who is often seen on tours alongside other cricketers' wives, might no longer be able to accompany Virat Kohli **PHOTO: X**

Down Under.

The report has also stated that during air travel, the BCCI would refrain from paying for players' luggage if the weight exceeds 150kg.

The BCCI has also tightened screws against head coach Gautam Gambhir and his manager Gaurav Arora. Neither would Gambhir's manager be allowed to stay in the team hotel, nor he would be permitted to be seated in the VIP box at stadiums. The manager would neither be allowed to accompany Gambhir in the team bus nor the bus behind it. —*PTI*

MINISTER HEBBALKAR, HER BROTHER INJURED IN CAR CRASH

BELAGAVI, 14 JAN

Karnataka's Minister for Women and Child Development, Laxmi Hebbalkar, and her brother, MLC Chan-naraj Hattiholi, sustained injuries in a car crash near Ambadagatti village in Kittur Taluk on Tuesday morn-ing. The incident occurred at approximately 6 AM when the vehicle, driven by Gangadharaiah, collided with a tree while attempting to avoid a stray dog that suddenly appeared on the road.

According to Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled, the front of the car was severely damaged. All three occupants, including the driver, were admitted to Vijaya Orthopaedic and Trauma Centre in Belagavi with light injuries. Minister Hebbalkar was seated in the back, while Hattiholi sat in the front passenger seat.

PHOTO: SALAR

Dr Ravi Patil, an orthopaedic specialist at the hospital, provided an update on their conditions. He noted that Minister Hebbalkar suffered injuries to her face, back, and neck, while Hattiholi sustained facial and neck injuries along with swelling in the brain. Both are reported to be stable, with the driver also recov-ering well. Dr Patil advised that Hattiholi would require a week of complete rest, while Minister Heb-balkar, a diabetic, needed at least a month of bed rest due to hairline cracks in her L1 and L4 vertebrae.

Remarkably, the minister's gunman and personal secretary, who were also in the vehicle, escaped un-harmed. The Kittur police have since registered a case concerning the incident. Witnesses reported the car travelling at high speed before the driver lost control. Gangadharaiah, a Bengaluru resident, holds a valid driving licence until 2034. —*Salar News*

Yeshwanthpur: Florist killed in hit-and-run case

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

A 51-year-old florist was killed in a hit-and-run accident near Sandal Soap Factory Circle in Yeshwanthpur on Tuesday morning. The victim Jayaram, a resident of Marappana Palya, was riding his scooter home from Yeshwanthpur around 5.30am when a speeding motorbike collided with his vehicle. The impact threw Jayaram onto the road, causing severe injuries. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Eyewitnesses reported that the motorbike rider immediately fled the scene without stopping to assist the victim. The Yeshwanthpur traffic police promptly arrived at the site, conducted a thorough inspection, and registered a case against the unidentified biker. Jayaram's body was sent to MS Ramaiah Hospital for an autopsy. *—Salar News*

Spanish consulate to be opened in City soon: EAM

He calls it a good sign for deepening Indo-Spanish ties

MADRID, JAN 14

Spain will soon open a consulate in Bengaluru, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said calling it a "good sign" for deepening the relations between both the countries.

Jaishankar, who is on a two-day visit to Spain, made these remarks on Monday while interacting with the Indian community here.

"In terms of our people-to-people relationship, I hope the people of Barcelona welcome that we have a consulate there... There will soon be a Spanish consulate in Bengaluru," he said while interacting with the community.

"These are good signs that our relationship is deepening and you create bigger establishments because you can say the business is becoming bigger. As the relationship deepens, for us to have a Consulate and who knows where we will be further in the future," he said.

On Monday, Jaishankar met his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares and discussed regional and global issues

PHOTO: PTI

"We have decided that we will mark 2026 as a dual year. A dual year where we will be celebrating culture, tourism and Artificial Intelligence in both countries. So through 2025, we will be working hard to prepare for 2026," he said.

This is Jaishankar's first visit to Spain as the external affairs minister - nearly two-and-a-half months after Spanish President Pedro Sanchez visited India.

On Monday, Jaishankar met his Spanish counterpart Jose Manuel Albares and discussed regional and global issues.

He also said that there are 230 Spanish companies in India and Delhi would welcome more of them to "join us and make in India, design in India and collaborate in India."

"When we look at our bilateral trade, it is about 10 billion euros. There are huge possibilities in railways, digital and urban technologies, smart cities, green and clean technologies...," he said. *—PTI*

BJP leaders R Ashoka and BY Vijayendra perform govu pooja (cow worship) at the residence of Karna in Chamarajpet, Bengaluru, on Tuesday. The pooja was conducted for Karna's cow, whose udder had been attacked.

PHOTO: SALAR

Innocent man framed in cow attack, says BJP

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

- BJP's outcry intensified after the party threatened to observe 'Black Sankranti' unless the true perpetrators were apprehended prior to the festival.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused local police of "framing" an innocent man in connection with a cow attack incident in Chamarajpet, sparking a communal controversy. Sheikh Nasir, a 30-year-old native of Champaran in Bihar, was arrested for allegedly slashing the udders of three cows on Sunday.

The BJP's outcry intensified after the party threatened to observe 'Black Sankranti' unless the true perpetrators were apprehended prior to the festival. On Tuesday, BJP state president B Y Vijayendra expressed doubts about the validity of the charges, asserting that an innocent individual had been falsely implicated. He called for a thorough investigation into the matter.

Leader of the Opposition, R Ashoka, raised further concerns about the police inquiry, questioning how a mentally unstable individual could maintain employment at the veterinary hospital for a decade. Ashoka highlighted that the incident took place on a property spanning four acres, which was recently designated as Waqf land, suggesting this change may have contributed to the conflict. He pointed out that the owner of the injured cattle, Karna, had opposed the Waqf Board's decision.

In response, Karnataka's Home Minister G Parameshwara dismissed the opposition's allegations, insisting that the police were conducting the investigation impartially. He assured that if evidence indicates the involvement of additional individuals, the police would take appropriate action. *—PTI*

Initial investigations suggest that a chemical reaction triggered the fire.

PHOTO: SALAR

Bioinnovation loses Rs 150 cr loss to fire

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

A fire broke out at the Bioinnovation Centre in Electronics City early on Tuesday, causing damages worth Rs 150 cr to the building and the equipment inside. No casualty was reported.

According to Electronics City police, the fire broke out around 4.40am on the second floor of the building's research wing.

More than 12 research labs were destroyed. An assessment of the total loss is being carried out.

The Bengaluru Fire Brigade responded promptly, with personnel from the Electronics City Fire Station rushing to the spot.

Fire officials said employees inside the building noticed the fire and swiftly evacuated the premises.

Initial investigations suggest that a chemical reaction triggered the fire.

Karnataka IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge visited the site later in the day to inspect the damage and assured government support for the recovery efforts.

The Electronics City Police have launched an investigation to find the exact cause of the fire. *—Salar News*

Half helmet is as good as no helmet, but riders don't care

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Helmet violation cases (including usage of half-helmets)

Year	No. of Cases registered	
	Driver	Pillion
2021	39,00,651	23,09,563
2022	43,92,381	26,08,122
2023	40,15,729	13,70,218
2024	31,91,846	20,97,167

Despite clear directives, a large number of two-wheeler riders in the city continue to flout helmet norms — they either opt for cheap and unsafe half-helmets or skip wearing one altogether.

Joint Commissioner (Traffic) MN Anucheth said, "Wearing half-helmets or one that does not meet safety standards is considered as not wearing a helmet at all."

While many two-wheeler riders wear helmets to evade fines, most people, especially youngsters, avoid one citing convenience. "I don't want to carry around such a big, heavy helmet," a biker said.

The Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) filed 43.9 lakh cases against helmetless drivers and 26 lakh against helmetless pillion riders in 2022 – a significant rise enabled by AI-enabled cameras treating a half-helmet as "no helmet". The figures were 40.1 lakh and 13.7 lakh, respectively, in 2023 and 31.9 lakh and 20.9 lakh, respectively, in 2024.

Poor enforcement exacerbates the issue. "Many riders use half-helmets. I haven't seen police taking action," said Ranjan, a private firm employee.

Bike taxis are another concern. Siddhi, a student, said, "A bike captain gave me a helmet without a strap. I had to hold it in place until I reached my drop location." Anucheth said, "Using a half-helmet or cap helmet is not approved and is booked as a violation under Sections 129 and 129(a) of the Motor Vehicles Act," he said. Asked about the sale of unsafe helmets going unchecked in the city, Anucheth said, "The public is encouraged to report violations to the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)." *—Salar News*

UDUPI TO HOST KARNATAKA KREEDAKOOTA 2025 FROM 17 JAN

UDUPI, 13 JAN

The Karnataka Kreedakoota 2025, a prestigious sports event organised by the Youth Empowerment and Sports Department, the Karnataka Olympic Association, and the District Administration, will take place across Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts from 17 to 23 January.

This year's event will feature 1,373 athletes competing in a diverse range of sports, including kayaking, canoeing, archery, cycling, wrestling, boxing, hockey, lawn tennis, table tennis, kabaddi, judo, and athletics. Deputy Commissioner Vidya Kumari K addressed the press on Monday, outlining the details of the venues and events.

Competitions in volleyball, basketball, and swimming will be held in Dakshina Kannada, while events such as kayaking and canoeing are scheduled for Brahmavara's Swarna River.

Archery will take place at the MJC Ground in Manipal, with our ladies and gentlemen engaged in lawn and table tennis at the Marena Sports Complex.

The opening ceremony will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 17 January in Mangaluru, while the closing ceremony on 23 January will be attended by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and Home Minister G Parameshwar.

The district administration, in collaboration with Manipal Academy of Higher Education, has ensured accommodation and food provisions for all participants. Additionally, repairs are underway on the synthetic track at Mahatma Gandhi District Stadium in Ajjarakad. *—PTI*

REPUBLIC DAY FLOWER SHOW

The Glass House at Lal Bagh is being prepared for the 217th Flower Show, which will be held as part of the Republic Day celebrations in Bengaluru. The event will take place from 16 to 27 January

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

FROM SPACEX ROCKET

Bengaluru start-up to launch satellite

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Bengaluru-based start-up Digantara is set to launch the world's first commercial satellite for surveillance of objects as small as 5 cm orbiting the Earth to ensure safer space operations.

Surveillance of outer space or situational space awareness (SSA) is important to ensure the safety of spacecraft as orbits around the Earth become crowded with artificial satellites as well as space debris.

Last month, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) had to delay the launch of SpaDeX satellites by two minutes due to congestion in the orbit and the path of the rocket. Even a slight nudge by a piece of debris to a spacecraft orbiting the Earth at over 25,000 km per hour could prove fatal.

Digantara's Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT) satellite is set for launch onboard SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission around Tuesday midnight from California.

Last month, ISRO had to delay the launch of SpaDeX satellites by two minutes due to congestion in the orbit and the path of the rocket ***PHOTO: PTI***

SCOT aims to enhance space safety, optimise traffic management and bolster national security initiatives, he said.

SCOT will be deployed in a sun-synchronous orbit, enabling it to track objects in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) with greater efficiency than existing sensors, which are constrained by weather conditions, geographic limitations and restricted fields of view.

As one of the world's first commercial Space Situational Awareness (SSA) satellites, SCOT is engineered to track Resident Space Objects (RSOs) with unmatched frequency and precision.

The statement said that in an era where space is becoming increasingly crowded and competitive, SCOT is purpose-built to monitor smaller RSOs, deliver higher revisit rates and provide enhanced tracking accuracy – filling a crucial gap left by current systems.

The satellite forms a key part of Digantara's mission to establish a hybrid network of surveillance systems, delivering persistent monitoring of the near-Earth environment to ensure improved safety and the long-term sustainability of space operations. *—PTI*

MAKAR SANKRANTI

Residents of Sudham Nagar in Bengaluru prepare sweet Pongal as part of Makar Sankranti festival on Tuesday

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Delhi PWD official booked for MCC violations

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Delhi Police has registered an FIR against a PWD official for violating the Model Code of Conduct, sources said on Tuesday. A complaint was initially filed by the returning officer against Chief Minister Atishi, alleging the use of a government vehicle for political purposes on 7 January, they said. Following a detailed investigation, the police registered an FIR against the Public Works Department (PWD) official for using a government vehicle for election campaigning. The case was filed at the Govind Puri Police Station here. A complaint letter regarding the matter was submitted to the assistant commissioner of police, Kalkaji. It further read the directive that there is an absolute ban on the use of official vehicles for campaigning, electioneering or election-related travel during the polls. *—PTI*

TMC worker shot dead in Malda district

MALDA, 14 JAN

Just days after the murder of a senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) councillor, violence erupted again in Malda district as a TMC worker was shot dead and two others were injured in a daylight shootout on Tuesday. The deceased, identified as Ataul Haque alias Hasu Sheikh, was attacked in the Kaliaganj area while attending a road inauguration alongside fellow party members. Local party leader Bakul Sheikh and another individual, Esaruddin Sheikh, were critically injured in the incident. Police suspect that the shootout stems from ongoing infighting within the TMC. "We are currently questioning witnesses but have yet to make any arrests," a senior police officer stated. This follows the murder of TMC councillor Dulal Sarkar on 2 January for which seven individuals have already been detained *—PTI*

If there is no BJP, Manipur will break, says Biren Singh

IMPHAL, 14 JAN

Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday said that out of a "sudden emotional outburst" people voted for the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections in Manipur, but its two MPs were not raising the state's core issues in Parliament. Addressing a party programme in Imphal, he claimed that if there is no BJP at the Centre, Manipur will break. He also criticised the Congress for its "silence" on former Union minister P Chidambaram's suggestion of giving regional autonomy to the three major communities in Manipur. Attacking the Congress over Chidambaram's post on X that was later deleted, he said the party never gave any clarification on the issue. "They (Congress) speak as if nothing is happening at the border here. They are not aware of the rising demographic imbalances," he said.Singh said that the BJP has "saved" the state.*—PTI*

Prohibitory orders imposed in Beed over protests

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 14 JAN

Prohibitory orders have been imposed in Maharashtra's Beed district till 28 January in view of protests against the murder of a sarpanch and quota-related agitations by Maratha and OBC activists. The assembly of five or more persons without permission from authorities has been prohibited and people are not allowed to carry weapons in public places, the district administration said in a release issued on Monday. Santosh Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district, was abducted, tortured and murdered on 9 December. Preliminary probe suggests he had tried to thwart an extortion bid on an energy firm operating a windmill project in the region. *—PTI*

BJP says AAP behind bomb threats to 400 schools

Accused boy's parents linked to NGO that funds a party

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

BJP on Tuesday asked AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal to clarify if his party has any connection with those allegedly involved in sending bomb threats to more than 400 schools in Delhi recently.

This came after Delhi Police claimed that a Class-12 student had sent hoax bomb threats to more than 400 city schools and that his parents are linked to an NGO that supports a political party. The police, however, did not reveal the name of the political party.

A police officer also said that during the investigation, it was found that the NGO had voiced support for Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru.

AAP took out a wedding procession without a groom on Tuesday in a dig at the BJP for not announcing its CM face for Assembly polls *PHOTO: PTI*

Hitting back, AAP accused BJP of "concocting stories" ahead of Assembly polls. Terming the police findings as "very sensitive and serious", BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi claimed it has also been found during the probe that the student's parents were associated with some NGOs that were involved in the past in such activities considered inimical to national security. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh mocked Trivedi called him the "newly appointed Delhi Police Commissioner". "He knows things that even the police is unaware of," the AAP leader said at a press conference.

Singh also asked why the BJP is raising the issue eight months after the first bomb threat was received by a school in the city in May last year. Kejriwal alleged BJP is distributing money and gold chains to lure voters ahead of the upcoming polls. *—PTI*

ATISHI FILES NOMINATION PAPERS

Delhi CM Atishi files her nomination from Kalkaji constituency for Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

MOVABLE ASSETS:

Cash in hand: ₹30,000

Gold jewellery: Valued at ₹1 lakh

Bank accounts: Approximately ₹75 lakh held in savings and fixed deposit

IMMOVABLE ASSETS:

Atishi does not own any property, house, or land

NET WORTH:

Current (2024):	Rs 76.93 lakh
Previous (2020):	Rs 59.79 lakh
Growth since 2020:	Rs 17.14 lakh

Atishi does not own a car

CLASH WITH CONG LEADER

KTR, Harish under house arrest after BRS MLA's arrest

HYDERABAD, 14 JAN

Senior leaders of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), KT Rama Rao and T Harish Rao, have reportedly been placed under "house arrest" in Hyderabad, following the arrest of party MLA P Kaushik Reddy.

The BRS has claimed that both former ministers are being detained at their residences by police. This development comes after Kaushik Reddy, the legislator for Huzurabad, was arrested on Monday in connection with a case filed against him for allegedly abusing fellow Congress MLA Sanjay Kumar during a district review committee meeting in Karimnagar on 12 January.

The confrontation between Reddy and Kumar escalated into a heated argument after Reddy questioned Kumar's party allegiance. Three cases were filed against Reddy after accusations were made by Kumar's personal assistant, alleging obstruction, and physical assault. Kumar, who defected from BRS to Congress in June 2024, filed a complaint against Reddy with Telangana Legislative Assembly Speaker G Prasad Kumar on Monday. In response to arrest, BRS leaders have expressed strong condemnation of the police action. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ex-NCP(SP) leader dies after holy dip in Prayagraj

PUNE, 14 JAN

Former Solapur mayor and NCP (SP) leader Mahesh Kothe died after he suffered a heart attack while taking a holy dip at the triveni confluence in Prayagraj on Tuesday, his aide said. He was 60.

The incident occurred around 7:30am at the Triveni Sangam, a confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the legendary Saraswati River.

"Kothe had gone to the triveni sangam to attend shahi snan. He suffered a heart attack in the river water. He was rushed to a medical facility but he was declared as brought dead," he said. Kothe's body will be brought to Solapur for the last rites on Wednesday. He is survived by wife and a son. Seers belonging to various 'akharas' took the first 'Amrit Snan' at the Maha Kumbh on the occasion of 'Makar Sankranti', with 1.38 crore devotees taking a dip at the Triveni Sangam till 8.30am. *—PTI*

FIR AGAINST AAP FOR POSTING AI VIDEOS OF PM, HM

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Delhi Police has registered an FIR against AAP for allegedly posting AI-generated photos and videos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on the party's official X handle, police sources said.

The alleged videos were posted by AAP on 10 January and 13 January.

One of the videos -- which was made by the AI-deepfake technology -- showed a scene from a 90s Bollywood flick where the faces of villains were swapped with that of BJP leaders and the audio was changed to a conversation on Delhi polls, an officer said. *—PTI*

Delhi polls: Cong releases 3rd list

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Congress on Tuesday released a list of 15 candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, fielding former Union minister Krishna Tirath from Patel Nagar and councillor Ariba Khan from Okhla.

The party also replaced its candidate in the Gokalpur (SC) constituency, fielding Ishwar Bagri in place of Pramod Kumar Jayant.

With this list, the Congress has declared a total of 63 candidates for the elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly.

Besides Tirath and Khan, the Congress' latest list includes Dharam Pal Lakda from Mundka, Rajesh Gupta from Kirari, Kunwar Karan Singh from Model Town, Prem Sharma from Hari Nagar, Harbani Kaur from Janakpuri and Mange Ram from Palam.

The Congress, earlier this month, released a single-name list, fielding Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba from Kalkaji to take on Chief Minister Atishi.

PHOTO: ANI

- The Congress, earlier this month, released a single-name list, fielding Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba from Kalkaji to take on Chief Minister Atishi. On 24 December, the party released its second list of 26 candidates

On 24 December, the party released its second list of 26 candidates.

The party had released its first list of 21 candidates earlier in December, fielding ex-MP Sandeep Dikshit from New Delhi, setting up a contest between him and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal. *—PTI*

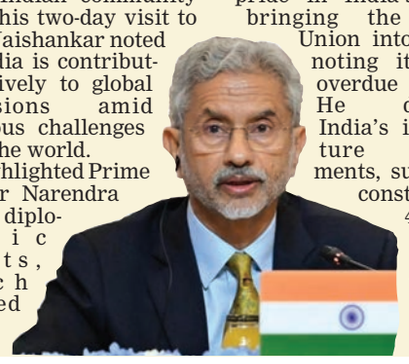
India can hold talks with Russia, Ukraine, Israel: EAM

MADRID, 14 JAN

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has emphasised India's unique position in addressing global conflicts, stating that India can engage with both Russia and Ukraine, as well as Israel and Iran. Speaking to the Indian community during his two-day visit to Spain, Jaishankar noted that India is contributing actively to global discussions amid numerous challenges facing the world.

He highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic efforts, which included two visits to Russia and a visit to Kyiv in the past year. "There are very few countries today who are in a position to talk to Russia and Ukraine," he remarked, while also referencing India's capability to engage with both Israel and Iran.

Jaishankar also expressed pride in India's role in bringing the African Union into the G20, noting it was an overdue inclusion. He discussed India's infrastructure advancements, such as the construction of 4,000 kilometres of new railway tracks annually, expanding highway development, and doubling the number of airports from 75 to over 150 in the past decade. He said 2026 will be designated a "dual year" for India and Spain, focusing on culture, tourism, and artificial intelligence. Jaishankar also revealed that Spain will soon establish a consulate in Bengaluru. He urged the Indian diaspora to remain engaged with their homeland, acknowledging the increased recognition of their contributions by the Indian government under Modi's leadership. This visit marks Jaishankar's first engagement in Spain since President Pedro Sanchez's visit to India. *—PTI*



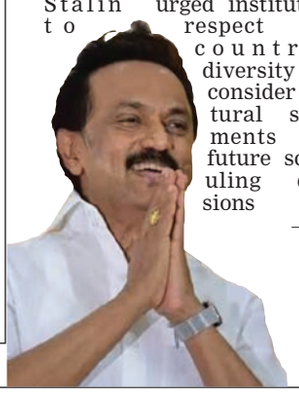
MK Stalin welcomes postponement of UGC-NET decision

CHENNAI, 14 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has praised the decision to postpone the UGC-National Eligibility Test (NET), originally scheduled for 15 January, highlighting the need for sensitivity towards Tamil cultural festivals.

In a post on social media platform X, Stalin expressed his satisfaction, stating, "I had written to the Union Education Minister requesting the rescheduling of the UGC NET exams. It is a rightful decision that the exams have now been postponed!" He criticised the recurring trend of scheduling significant exams on important Tamil festival days, noting that such decisions often require state intervention for change.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) confirmed the postponement on 13 January, citing representations received regarding conflicts with festivals, including Pongal and Makar Sankranti. Rajesh Kumar, Director (Exams) at the NTA, stated, "In the interest of the aspirants, the exam has been postponed, and a new date will be announced later." Stalin urged institutions to respect the country's diversity and consider cultural sentiments in future scheduling decisions *—PTI*



FIR against Haryana BJP Chief, singer for 'gang rape'

NEW DELHI, 30 OCT

Haryana BJP chief Mohanlal Badoli and a singer were booked after a woman alleged that she was gang-raped by them in a hotel in Kasauli. Himachal Pradesh Police has registered an FIR against the two men, officials said on Tuesday.

According to the complainant, the two men made videos of the act and threatened to kill the victim if she disclosed the incident to anyone, they said.

The FIR registered in Kasauli in Solan district on 13 December, 2024, names Badoli and Jai Bhagwan alias Rocky. A copy of the FIR was doing the rounds on social media on Tuesday.

BJP Chief Mohanlal Badoli; Singer Jai Bhagwan *PHOTO: PTI*

According to the FIR, the woman was staying in a hotel in Kasauli with her boss and friend when they met the two accused on July 3, 2023. While Badoli introduced himself as a political leader, Rocky introduced himself as a singer.

Later, the woman and her friend went into a room with the two accused, who promised to help the complainant get a government job and a chance to feature in a music video, the FIR said.

The accused allegedly forced the complainant to drink liquor. When she refused, they raped her, she said in her complaint.

They also clicked pictures and recorded videos of the act and threatened to kill the woman if she disclosed the incident to anyone, the FIR added.

The complainant further alleged that two months ago, she was called to Rocky's house in Panchkula where the accused threatened to implicate her in a false case, police said.

Based on the woman's complaint, police said, a case has been registered against Badoli and Rocky under sections 376 D (gang rape) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). *—PTI*

REQUIRE EXTRA FUNDING NEEDED

ONOE row: EC calls for 800 warehouses for EVM storage

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Election Commission (EC) has indicated a necessity for 800 additional warehouses nationwide for the secure storage of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and related equipment, should the country proceed with simultaneous elections for both the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

The poll body has characterised the construction of these warehouses as a "laborious process" that involves significant costs. Financial responsibility for land acquisition and construction falls to the respective state governments.

In March 2023, the EC shared its insights regarding various logistical requirements for conducting simultaneous elections with the Law Commission and the Department of Legal Affairs within the Union Law Ministry. These views are now included in the documents provided to members of a joint parliamentary committee that is currently examining two proposed bills aimed at establishing a mechanism for simultaneous polls in India.

"For safe and secure storage of EVMs and VVPATs, approximately 800 additional warehouses will be necessary," the EC states. It outlined that implementing stringent safety and security measures in all proposed warehouses—including the deployment of security personnel, regular inspections, fire alarm systems, and CCTV surveillance—will require extra funding and could pose administrative challenges.

However, the poll panel expressed confidence that, with adequate lead time and prioritisation from state governments, these challenges could be addressed effectively.

Currently, there are approximately 772 districts across the country. The initiative for "dedicated warehouses" commenced in July 2012, aiming to ensure secure storage in each district. It was previously identified that 326 districts needed new warehouse constructions. As of March 2023, 194 warehouses have been completed, 106 are under construction, land for 13 has been identified but not yet grounded, and for another 13 districts, land allocation is still pending. *—PTI*

Financial responsibility for land acquisition and construction falls on the respective state governments *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Goa–Mumbai IndiGo flight gets hoax bomb threat

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

An IndiGo flight from Goa to Mumbai received a bomb threat on Monday evening, but security checks revealed that it was a hoax. An airport official on Tuesday said a note was found onboard the plane with the message about the purported bomb threat. After landing at the Mumbai airport, the aircraft operating the flight 6E 5101 was taken to an isolation bay and all passengers safely disembarked, a statement issued by the airline said on Tuesday. "All standard operating procedures were followed, and the aircraft was positioned back to the terminal post clearance from relevant authorities," the statement said. A full emergency was declared at the Mumbai airport around 10.30pm, which was withdrawn at 11.30pm, the airport official said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Landmine explosion in J&K, 6 jawans injured

JAMMU, 14 JAN

At least six Army personnel were on Tuesday injured in a landmine explosion in a forward village in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said.

The troops were on patrol duty when one of the soldiers accidentally stepped over the landmine near Khamba Fort in Nowshera sector around 10.45 am, triggering the explosion, the officials said.

They said the injured were immediately shifted to hospital and their condition was stated to be stable.

As part of an anti-infiltration obstacle system, the forward areas near the Line of Control are dotted with landmines which sometimes get washed away by rains resulting in such accidents, the officials said. —*PTI*

Woman accuses Facebook friend of rape, torture

JAMMU, 14 JAN

At least six Army personnel were on Tuesday injured in a landmine explosion in a forward village in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said. The troops were on patrol duty when one of the soldiers accidentally stepped over the landmine near Khamba Fort in Nowshera sector around 10.45 am, triggering the explosion, the officials said. They said the injured were immediately shifted to hospital and their condition was stated to be stable. As part of an anti-infiltration obstacle system, the forward areas near the Line of Control are dotted with landmines which sometimes get washed away by rains resulting in such types of accidents, the officials said. —*PTI*

Negligent driver caused BEST bus accident: Court

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

The driver of the BEST bus involved in an accident in Mumbai in December was driving in a rash and negligent manner, and it is hard to believe there was any fault in the vehicle, a sessions court has said while refusing him bail. Seven lives perished in that accident, which also left more than 40 persons injured. More was arrested the same night. Additional Sessions Judge VM Pathade rejected the bail application of the accused driver, Sanjay More, on January 10. "Considering the gravity and seriousness of the crime and the punishment provided for the offences under which the accused is booked, I do not find it a fit case to enlarge the accused on bail," the judge said. —*PTI*

BEAUTY OF FESTIVALS

Residents of various Indian cities celebrated harvest festivals on Tuesday. In Mumbai's Dharavi, women prepared Pongal, while in Bhopal, people flew kites for Makar Sankranti. Meanwhile, in Assam's Nagaon, women dressed in traditional Assamese attire performed dances to mark Magh Bihu celebrations ***PHOTOS: PTI***

BULL TAMER KILLED AT TN JALLIKATTU, 10 INJURED

Approx 825 bulls, 500 men took part in the event

MADURAI, 14 JAN

The popular Avaniyapuram 'Jallikattu,' bull taming sport, was held here on Tuesday on the day of harvest festival 'Pongal,' and the owner of the bull, declared as best, won a tractor as prize, and the bull tamer declared first got a car.

A bull tamer was killed and atleast 10 were injured.

As the bulls, smeared with sandalpaste, leaped out of the 'Vadivasal,' the entrance to the sporting arena from the enclosure for animals, enthusiastic young men, one after the other, tried their best to get a hold around the bull's hump to emerge the winner.

While the men and bulls were engaged in a nerve-racking game to outsmart each other, the spectators thronged the venue to get a first hand experience and a few boys and girls too ran into the arena out of sheer excitement and the day turned out be fun and frolic for them.

While tamers did try their best to embrace every bull, their efforts turned futile in respect of some bulls as they were frightened by the menacing looks and posture of the animals.

People try to take control of a bull as they participate in Jallikattu, the bull taming sport event, at Tamil Nadu's Madurai, on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The sporting event also had its share of distressing moments as a young man, Navin Kumar, was gored to death by a bull and atleast 10 others sustained injuries. Some clashes also took place such as a minor incident between a few players and a bull owner.

Malayandi, the owner of the bull adjudged the best for successfully dodging many tamers received a tractor as first prize and Karthik, named the outstanding player for subduing as many as 19 bulls got a car as the first prize.

A young man, Ranjit Kumar of Avaniyapuram, won Rs 1 lakh cash prize for embracing a ferocious bull. Also, prizes were distributed for other category of winners, which includes a motorcycle.

The top prizes were given away on behalf of Chief Minister M K Stalin (tractor) and Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin (car), Minister for Commercial Taxes, P Moorthy said.

Minister for Information Technology, Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, top district officials took part.

In total, approximately 825 bulls and 500 men took part in the event. Police had made elaborate security arrangements.

On 15 and 16 January, jallikattu will be held at Madurai's Palamedu and Alanganallur respectively.

Although days ago, a jallikattu event was held in Pudukottai district's Thatchankurichi, marking the commencement of the 2025 sporting season, the events in Madurai, beginning with Avaniyapuram here, are the most popular. —*PTI*

PLACE DOES NOT MATTER, PRAYERS DO

3.5 cr take holy dip in Maha Kumbh

3.5 crore took the first 'Amrit Snan' at Maha Kumbh on Makar Sankranti on Tuesday at Triveni Sangam, which is the confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati ***PHOTO: PTI***

Pilgrims gather at annual Gangasagar

Lakhs of pilgrims took the holy dip at Gangasagar – the confluence of River Hooghly and Bay of Bengal – in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas, at Sagar Island, 100 km south of Kolkata ***PHOTO: PTI***

SAME OLD STORY

Asaram gets interim bail in 2013

JODHPUR, 14 JAN

The Rajasthan High Court on Tuesday granted interim bail till March 31 to self-styled godman Asaram, who is serving life imprisonment in a 2013 rape case.

This development comes a week after the Supreme Court granted him bail till March 31 in another rape case, observing that he suffered from various ailments and needed treatment.

Soon after the top court granted him relief on medical grounds, Asaram's counsels moved a suspension of sentence plea in the high court.

A division bench of Justices Dinesh Mehta and Vineet Kumar Mathur granted interim bail to Asaram considering that the nature of the plea was similar to the one filed in the Supreme Court.

"We argued that the plea was similar in nature to that filed in the Supreme Court and the grounds stand valid in this case as well," Asaram's counsel Nishant Bora said.

Bora said the conditions for Asaram's interim bail are the same as those set by the apex court on 7 January except one.

"If Asaram wants to travel outside (Jodhpur), he will have to bear the expenses of the three constables who have been asked to accompany him," Bora said.

A lower court sentenced Asaram to life imprisonment in April 2018 for raping a minor at his ashram in Jodhpur in 2013. —*PTI*

Kerala HC grants bail to Chemmanur

KOCHI, 14 JAN

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday granted bail to prominent businessman Boby Chemmanur, popularly known as "Bo-Che", in a sexual harassment case filed against him by a Malayalam film actor.

"Allowed," the case status of the plea on the High Court website said.

Justice PV Kunhikrishnan, while hearing the businessman's bail plea, noted that Chemmanur's passport was already deposited in court and that he would be available to the police during its investigation. "Will pass a detailed order by 3.30pm," the judge said.

During the hearing, the court also said it cannot be said that Chemmanur's remarks about the actor did not have double meaning. "We cannot say there is no double meaning," it said.

It also pointed out that certain averments made in the bail plea, regarding the actor's professional skills and competence, were also "insulting". The prosecution opposed the bail plea, claiming that almost all of Chemmanur's social media posts carried sexually coloured remarks. It contended that granting him relief would send a wrong message to society. The court, on the other hand, said that a message has already gone to the society as the businessman was in judicial custody since 9January. Chemmanur, currently lodged in the District Jail in Kochi, approached the High Court after the Ernakulam Judicial Magistrate Court-II denied him bail on 9 January . —*PTI*

Rs 10L given to murdered scribe's kin

RAIPUR, 14 JAN

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Tuesday announced an aid of Rs 10 lakh to the kin of journalist Mukesh Chandrakar, who was murdered in Bijapur earlier this month. Sai said a building will be constructed for scribes and named after the slain journalist. Freelance journalist Mukesh Chandrakar, 33, went missing on 1 January. His body was found on 3 January in a septic tank on a property owned by road contractor Suresh Chandrakar at Chattanpara Basti in Bijapur. Suresh Chandrakar, the prime accused, was arrested from Hyderabad on 5 January, while his brothers Ritesh and Dinesh and supervisor Mahendra Ramteke were arrested earlier. Suresh, the slain journalist's relative, was enraged after the latter published a news report highlighting alleged corruption in his road construction work. Mukesh Chandrakar worked as a freelance journalist for NDTV and ran a YouTube channel, 'Bastar Junction'. —*PTI*

Mukesh Chandrakar ***PHOTO: ANI***

UP razes building on temple land

SAMBHAL, 14 JAN

Authorities in Sambhal cleared illegal encroachment at the Sati Math temple in the Nai Sarai area under the Kotwali Sambhal jurisdiction on Monday, officials said on Tuesday.

A bulldozer was deployed to remove the unauthorised construction under the leadership of SDM Vandana Mishra.

PHOTO: ANI

"We received information about illegal encroachment at the Sati Math temple, where plots were being created by filling the foundation.

"After conducting a survey, the encroachment was removed, freeing approximately 82 square metres of land," SDM Mishra said.

She further added, "A case will be registered under the Anti-Land Mafia Act, and strict legal action will follow."

Sambhal has been in the news after five people were killed during a protest against a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid. —*PTI*

ATAL SETU TURNS 1

Atal Setu recorded daily traffic of 22,689 vehicles. This is less than half of projected 56,000 daily

- Opened by PM Narendra Modi on 12 January, 2024.
- 22km bridge connects Mumbai to Navi Mumbai.
- It is India's longest bridge.
- Cost: ₹17,840 crore
- 83,06,009 vehicles used the bridge in the past year.
- 61,807 vehicles was its highest single-day count.

SUCCEEDS SOMANATH

Narayanan takes charge as ISRO Chief

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

The ISRO on Tuesday announced that Dr V Narayanan has assumed charge as the Indian space agency's chairman, taking over the responsibility from S Somanath.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the ISRO said, "Dr V Narayanan, Distinguished Scientist (Apex Grade), assumed the charge of Secretary, Department of Space, Chairman, Space Commission and Chairman, ISRO, on the afternoon of 13 January, 2025." Narayanan has served as the Director of ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC), a key facility responsible for the development of propulsion systems for launch vehicles and spacecraft. He also played a pivotal role as the Chairman of the national-level Human Rated Certification Board for the Gaganyaan programme – India's ambitious human spaceflight mission. A veteran scientist, Narayanan joined ISRO in 1984 and has contributed significantly to India's space missions over the decades. He became the Director of LPSC in January 2018, cementing his reputation as a leader in rocket and spacecraft propulsion technologies. Narayanan is an alumnus of IIT-Kharagpur, where he completed his MTech in Cryogenic Engineering and PhD in Aerospace Engineering.

Former ISRO chief S Somanath greets V Narayanan after the latter assumed charge as ISRO Chairman ***PHOTO: PTI***

Over his 40-year tenure at ISRO, including seven years as Director of the LPSC, he has made groundbreaking contributions to India's space programme. "When India was denied the cryogenic technology for GSLV Mk-ll vehicle, he designed the engine systems, developed software tools, contributed for establishing the necessary infrastructure and test facilities, testing and qualification and completing the development of Cryogenic Upper Stage and making it operational," ISRO said. —*PTI*

RUSH OF DEVOTION

Rush of devotees at the Sabarimala temple for Makaravilakku festival, which marks the culmination of the over two-month-long annual pilgrimage season in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala, on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

India boosts ties with Taliban, focuses on trade

With its first high-level, bilateral engagement with the Taliban regime, New Delhi appears ready to increase ties with Kabul. This would mark a significant step in diplomatic engagement for the Islamist group.

Stepping up its outreach with the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met with the regime's acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai on Wednesday.

According to a statement by the Taliban Foreign Affairs Ministry, the discussions covered topics such as security concerns in Afghanistan, the need for India to engage in development projects and provide humanitarian assistance, and Afghanistan's use of Chabahar port in Iran to bring trade to the conflict-ridden country.

"In line with Afghanistan's balanced and economy-focused foreign policy, the Islamic Emirate aims to strengthen political and economic ties with India as a significant regional and economic partner," the statement said.

The meeting marked the highest level of dialogue between India and the Taliban since the latter seized Kabul in August 2021.

"In response to the request from the Afghan side, India will provide further material support in the first instance to the health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees. The two sides also discussed strengthening of sports [cricket] cooperation," India's Foreign Office said after the meeting.

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, an Afghanistan expert monitoring recent events, agreed that the meeting marks a significant step as India appears to be working to meet the diplomatic requirements that would enable it to comprehensively engage with the Taliban.

"At the heart of India's policy is the goal of regaining its lost influence and reestablishing its connections in Kabul," D'Souza, founder of the Mantraya Institute for Strategic Studies, told DW.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri during a meeting with Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai
PHOTO: X/@MEAINDIA

"Additionally, India aims to restore its influence in a region where China has significantly stepped up its presence since August 2021," she added.

Gautam Mukhopadhyay, a former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan, told DW that India is reassessing its diplomatic stance and working to stabilize its relationship with the current Taliban leadership. "India is under no pressure to formally recognize the Taliban, more so when there seem to be visible internal strains within the Taliban, who continues to harshly repress women and deprive them of any rights," he said.

In November, senior foreign ministry official JP Singh held multiple meetings with Taliban representatives, including a notable meeting with acting Defense Minister Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob.

In June 2022, India sent a "technical team" to Kabul to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and to see how New Delhi could support the Afghan people.

Since the opening of the technical mission, the Taliban have been demanding to place their own representative in Delhi. India has since permitted a Taliban representative, Ikramuddin Kamil, to work at the Afghan consulate in Mumbai. The Taliban subsequently called for the easing of visa processes for Afghan students, patients and businessmen. "This high-level meeting is the logical next step after opening a tech mission and is preceded by several other meetings at the official level. Diplomacy is a two-way street," Amar Sinha, former Afghanistan envoy, told DW.

Ajay Bisaria, a former Indian envoy to Pakistan, told DW that India's pragmatic engagement is part of a larger compact with the Taliban where India demands that Afghan soil not be used for any anti-India activity in return for India permitting limited engagement and continued humanitarian support. "In contrast, Pakistan views Afghanistan as a geography to achieve strategic depth and influence, particularly after the US withdrew in 2021," said Bisaria.

Taliban's relationship with Pakistan has soured particularly due to issues related to cross-border terrorism and recent Pakistani airstrikes on Afghan territory targeting militant members of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). "These moves are largely a consequence of the flawed policies that Pakistan has adopted in dealing with its neighbors, privileging narrow military objectives over sane diplomatic goals," he added.

"India and the Taliban have developed a pragmatic understanding. For the Afghans, the difference between the two approaches is clear," added Bisaria. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Delhi polls: Auto drivers grapple with CNG costs

Grappling with rising CNG costs and navigating the government's push for electric vehicles, auto drivers in Delhi are weighing their options this election season.

Auto rickshaw drivers, seen as a dependable vote bank for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), say they are facing a host of challenges which could influence their electoral preferences in the February 5 elections.

For years, auto drivers have played a significant role in Delhi's electoral politics. Their visibility on the streets, combined with their direct interactions with lakhs of commuters, makes them crucial opinion influencers and grassroot campaigners for political parties.

However, as this election season heats up, cracks are beginning to appear in the AAP's dependable votebank.

Many auto drivers feel the AAP has worked for their benefit in the past but believe more could have been done to address their woes.

"They (AAP) increased fares a few years back, which was good for us. But now, with CNG prices skyrocketing, it barely makes a difference," Rajesh Kumar, a driver at the New Delhi Railway station, said.

Other auto drivers echoed concerns about operational costs.

"Maintenance is expensive, fuel is expensive, and passengers always negotiate fares. We are struck between rising costs and shrinking income," Suresh Yadav, an auto driver hailing from Laxmi Nagar, said.

The AAP government in 2023 revised auto and taxi fares amid increase in CNG price in the national capital. Fuel prices fluctuate based on global crude oil market trends.

For this year's election the AAP has announced several benefits for auto rickshaw drivers.

AAP convener and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in December announced that auto drivers would be provided with life insurance coverage of Rs 10 lakh and accident insurance of Rs 5 lakh.

Additionally, drivers will receive Rs 1 lakh for their daughter's wedding, Rs 2,500 twice a year for uniforms (during Holi and Diwali), and coaching fees for competitive exams.

The PoochO app, which helps users book registered auto rides, will also be re-launched.

The government's push for e-autos has also divided auto drivers. While some see it as a welcome change, others find the transition daunting due to the high initial costs and lack of adequate charging infrastructure. "Who has Rs 2-3 lakh to buy an e-auto? Even if we take a loan, where are the charging stations? It feels like they announce these policies without thinking about us," Irfan, who has been driving an auto for the past 15 years, said.

However, a few drivers appreciate the subsidies offered for e-autos.

"AAP has done a lot to make e-autos affordable, but they need to solve the charging issue first," Karan, who recently switched to an electric vehicle, said.

For many drivers, the biggest challenge remains the competition from the app-based services like Ola and Uber.

"They have eaten into our business. People prefer booking cabs now. The government has not done enough to protest our interests," auto driver Arvind Sharmamsaid.

While the AAP has promised to regulate ride-hailing apps to create level playing field, several drivers claim the promises remain unfulfilled.

Auto drivers have also voiced concern over lack of social security measures.

"We have no health insurance or pension. If something happens to us, our families suffer. All we ask is for the government to think about our future too," another auto driver Ram Lal said.

Despite these grievances, many auto drivers still see the AAP as their best bet.

"Whatever anyone says, they have done more for us than other parties. The BJP or Congress never even talked about auto drivers," Vinod Kumar, who has been driving an auto for nearly two decades, said.

"We are still with them, but they need to listen to us more. If we are their vote bank, they should solve our problems," Anil Mishra, an auto driver from Karol Bagh, said. Though it remains to be seen whether the auto drivers will continue to back the AAP overwhelmingly or will their grievances drive them to consider alternatives, a majority of auto drivers remain active participants in the AAP's election campaign with some displaying party flags and posters on their vehicles. *—PTI*

Many auto drivers feel Aam Aadmi Party has worked for their benefit in the past, but believe more could have been done to address their woes
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Meta's removal of fact-checking sparks polarisation concerns

Meta founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has announced big changes in how the company addresses misinformation across Facebook, Instagram and Threads. Instead of relying on independent third-party factcheckers, Meta will now emulate Elon Musk's X in using "community notes". These crowdsourced contributions allow users to flag content they believe is questionable. Zuckerberg claimed these changes promote "free expression". But some experts worry he's bowing to right-wing political pressure, and will effectively allow a deluge of hate speech and lies to spread on Meta platforms.

Research on the group dynamics of social media suggests those experts have a point.

At first glance, community notes might seem democratic, reflecting values of free speech and collective decisions. Crowdsourced systems such as Wikipedia, Metaculus and PredictIt, though imperfect, often succeed at harnessing the wisdom of crowds — where the collective judgement of many can sometimes outperform even experts.

Research shows that diverse groups that pool independent judgements and estimates can be surprisingly effective at discerning the truth. However, wise crowds seldom have to contend with social media algorithms.

Many people rely on platforms such as Facebook for their news, risking exposure to misinformation and biased sources. Relying on social media users to police information accuracy could further polarise platforms and amplify extreme voices.

Two group-based tendencies — our psychological need to sort ourselves and others into groups — are of particular concern: in-group/out-group bias and acrophily (love of extremes).

Humans are biased in how they evaluate information. People are more likely to trust and remember information from their in-group — those who share their identities — while distrusting information from perceived out-groups. This bias leads to echo chambers, where like-minded people reinforce shared beliefs, regardless of accuracy.

It may feel rational to trust family, friends or colleagues over strangers. But in-group sources often hold similar perspectives and experiences, offering little new information. Out-group members, on the other hand, are more likely to provide diverse viewpoints. This diversity is critical to the wisdom of crowds.

Many people rely on platforms such as Facebook for their news, risking exposure to misinformation and biased sources
PHOTO: X

But too much disagreement between groups can prevent community fact-checking from even occurring. Many community notes on X, such as those related to Covid vaccines, were likely never shown publicly because users disagreed with one another. The benefit of third-party fact-checking was to provide an objective outside source, rather than needing widespread agreement from users across a network.

Worse, such systems are vulnerable to manipulation by well organised groups with political agendas. For instance, Chinese nationalists reportedly mounted a campaign to edit Wikipedia entries related to China-Taiwan relations to be more favourable to China.

Indeed, politics intensifies these dynamics. In the US, political identity increasingly dominates how people define their social groups. Political groups are motivated to define "the truth" in ways that advantage them and disadvantage their political opponents. It's easy to see how organised efforts to spread politically motivated lies and discredit inconvenient truths could corrupt the wisdom of crowds in Meta's community notes.

Social media accelerates this problem through a phenomenon called acrophily, or a preference for the extreme. Research shows that people tend to engage with posts slightly more extreme than their own views. These increasingly extreme posts are more likely to be negative than positive. Psychologists have known for decades that bad is more engaging than good. We are hardwired to pay more attention to negative experiences and information than positive ones. On social media, this means negative posts – about violence, disasters and crises – get more attention, often at the expense of more neutral or positive content.

Those who express these extreme, negative views gain status within their groups, attracting more followers and amplifying their influence. Over time, people come to think of these slightly more extreme negative views as normal, slowly moving their own views toward the poles.

A recent study of 2.7 million posts on Facebook and Twitter found that messages containing words such as "hate", "attack" and "destroy" were shared and liked at higher rates than almost any other content. This suggests that social media isn't just amplifying extreme views — it's fostering a culture of out-group hate that undermines the collaboration and trust needed for a system like community notes to work.

The combination of negativity bias, in-group/out-group bias and acrophily supercharges one of the greatest challenges of our time: polarisation. Through polarisation, extreme views become normalised, eroding the potential for shared understanding across group divides.

However, social media algorithms often work against these solutions, creating echo chambers and trapping people's attention.

For community notes to work, these algorithms would need to prioritise diverse, reliable sources of information.

While community notes could theoretically harness the wisdom of crowds, their success depends on overcoming these psychological vulnerabilities.

Perhaps increased awareness of these biases can help us design better systems — or empower users to use community notes to promote dialogue across divides. Only then can platforms move closer to solving the misinformation problem. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Biden names aircraft carriers after Clinton, Bush

WASHINGTON DC, 14 JAN

US President Joe Biden on Monday announced naming two nuclear-powered aircraft carriers after former presidents Bill Clinton and George W Bush. Clinton, a Democrat, was the 42nd US president, holding office between 1993 and 2001. He was succeeded by Bush, a Republican, who held office from 2001 to 2009. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said aircraft carriers were the centrepiece of the US's naval forces and they ensured the country projected power and delivered combat capability anytime and anywhere in defence of "our democracy". "These two future carriers are named after historically significant commanders-in-chief who served our country with determination and dedication," he said. *—PTI*

BNP demands B'desh election by July-August

DHAKA, 14 JAN

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Tuesday demanded that the general election be held by July-August this year, refuting interim government chief adviser Muhammad Yunus's stance to stage it by the year-end or mid-2026. "There is no reason to delay the election that much," said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir after an overnight meeting of the party's standing committee that was chaired virtually by acting BNP chairperson Tarique Rahman from London. BNP also criticised the interim government's policies, particularly plans for gas price hikes and tax increases. "We have repeatedly said there is no alternative to elected government and this is the most important factor for democracy," Alamgir said. *—PTI*

SL Prez arrives in Beijing for 4-day China tour

BEIJING/COLOMBO, 14 JAN

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has arrived in China for a four-day visit aimed at deepening bilateral relations. Upon arrival, he received a ceremonial welcome from the Chinese military and was greeted by Deputy Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong. This marks Dissanayake's second international trip since taking office in September, following a visit to India. During discussions with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and other leaders, Dissanayake plans to focus on enhancing cooperation through several Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs), particularly in technology and agriculture. *—PTI*

Singapore faces intense monsoon, flight delays

SINGAPORE, 14 JAN

The recent monsoon surge impacting Singapore and its surroundings is noted to be particularly prolonged and intense, according to the Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS). The surge, which began on Friday and started to ease on Monday, has brought moderate to heavy showers accompanied by occasional thunderstorms. Changi Airport faced disruptions as twelve flights were diverted. These flights originated from destinations such as Bangkok, Jakarta, and Shanghai. Singapore Airlines has reported ongoing delays and schedule changes, with more than 50 flights affected over the preceding days. Changi recorded a staggering 255.2mm of rain from Friday to Saturday, surpassing the monthly January average of 222.4mm. MSS notes that Singapore typically experiences between two to four monsoon surges each year, with each lasting from one to five days. *—PTI*

3-step Gaza deal to see prisoner swaps

33 people including 5 female Israeli soldiers to be exchanged for 50 Palestinian prisoners

CAIRO, 14 JAN

Hamas has said in a statement that the ongoing negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and the release of dozens of hostages have reached their "final stage".

The three-phase agreement – based on a framework laid out by US President Joe Biden and endorsed by the UN Security Council – would begin with the gradual release of 33 hostages, including women, children, older adults and wounded civilians, over a six-week period in exchange for potentially hundreds of Palestinian women and children imprisoned by Israel.

Among the 33 would be five female Israeli soldiers, each of whom would be released in exchange for 50 Palestinian prisoners, including 30 convicted militants who are serving life sentences. By the end of the first phase, all civilian captives will have been released.

People in Tel Aviv protest demanding a ceasefire deal and the immediate release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by Hamas *PHOTO: PTI*

During this first 42-day phase, Israeli forces would withdraw from population centres, Palestinians would be allowed to start returning to their homes in northern Gaza and there would be a surge of humanitarian aid, with some 600 trucks entering each day.

Details of the second phase still must be negotiated during the first. Those details remain difficult to resolve – and the deal does not include written guarantees that the ceasefire will continue until a deal is reached. That leaves the potential for Israel to resume its military campaign after the first phase ends.

In the second phase, Hamas would release the remaining living captives, mainly male soldiers, in exchange for more prisoners and the "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza, according to the draft agreement. But Hamas has said it will not free the remaining hostages without an end to the war and a complete Israeli withdrawal, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has in the past vowed to resume fighting unless Hamas's military and governing capabilities are eliminated.

In the third phase, the bodies of remaining hostages would be returned in exchange for a three- to five-year reconstruction plan to be carried out in Gaza under international supervision.

Israeli strikes across Gaza overnight and into Tuesday killed at least 18 Palestinians, including two women and four children, while Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two missiles at Israel, setting off sirens and sending people racing into shelters. No one was wounded by the projectiles. *—PTI*

Special counsel defends Trump's prosecution

WASHINGTON DC, 14 JAN

Special counsel Jack Smith has released a comprehensive report detailing his investigation into President-elect Donald Trump's attempts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. Smith expressed unwavering support for his decisions, stating that the evidence presented would likely have led to a conviction had voters not re-elected Trump.

The report, released just days before Trump's return to office on 20 January, underscores his deceptive claims of election fraud and outlines how these falsehoods were weaponised against a key democratic process. Smith contends that Trump's actions

Jack Smith; Donald Trump *PHOTO: X*

threatened the peaceful transfer of power, an integral aspect of American democracy.

Trump was indicted in August 2023 for his efforts to overturn the election, but the case became mired in appeals and was ultimately narrowed by a conservative-majority Supreme Court, which affirmed that former presidents enjoy broad immunity from prosecution for official acts. Consequently, the Department of Justice opted to dismiss the indictment in November, adhering to the principle that a sitting president cannot face federal prosecution.

In the report, Smith defended his team's integrity amid accusations of politicisation, calling such claims "laughable." He noted significant obstacles faced during the investigation, including Trump's use of social media to intimidate witnesses and officials.

Smith explained their decision not to charge Trump with incitement or insurrection due to First Amendment concerns and the unprecedented nature of certain allegations.

Despite the challenges, Smith stated, "I believe the fact that our team stood up for the rule of law matters," emphasising the importance of setting an example for fighting for justice irrespective of personal costs. *—PTI*

N Korea launches projectile into eastern waters again

SEOUL, 14 JAN

North Korea test-fired multiple missiles into its eastern waters on Tuesday, continuing its series of weapons demonstrations ahead of Donald Trump's potential return to the White House. South Korea's joint chiefs of staff reported that the missiles were likely short-range ballistic types launched from a northern inland region, though the extent of their flight range remains unclear.

In response, the South Korean military has stepped up surveillance efforts and shared intelligence regarding the launches with the United States and Japan. This marks North Korea's second round of missile testing in 2025, following a ballistic launch on 6 January. That event featured a new hypersonic intermediate-range missile intended to target remote locations in the Pacific, with leader Kim Jong Un reaffirming his commitment to expanding the country's nuclear capabilities in opposition to its rivals.

The North's recent military activity follows a tumultuous year of weapons testing, showcasing advanced systems, including solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking the US mainland and various shorter-range missiles designed to breach South Korea's missile defences. Concerns are mounting that North Korea's military advancements may be bolstered by technological assistance from Russia amid their recent alignment due to the war in Ukraine.

NorthKorea fires 10 short-range ballistic missiles into East Sea *PHOTO: X*

At a year-end political conference, Kim pledged to adopt the "toughest" anti-US policies and criticized the Biden administration for fostering a "nuclear military bloc for aggression" with Seoul and Tokyo. Although Trump previously engaged in diplomacy with Kim, experts assert that prospects for renewed talks face significant obstacles given North Korea's strengthened military posture. *—PTI*

LA FIRE RAGES ON

More powerful winds are expected to trigger new wildfires that could set back the recent progress made in containing blazes in the Los Angeles area that have destroyed thousands of homes and killed at least 24 people. A large portion of southwest California spanning eight counties around Los Angeles is under a red flag warning *PHOTO: X*

Philippines: China cornering us in South China Sea

MANILA, 14 JAN

A Philippine security official said Tuesday that China is "pushing us to the wall" with growing aggression in the disputed South China Sea and warned that "all options are on the table" for Manila's response, including new international lawsuits.

On Tuesday, a large Chinese coast guard ship patrolled hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal and then sailed toward the northwestern coast of the Philippines, coming as close as 143kms Philippine officials said in a news conference. "The presence of the monster ship in Filipino waters... 77 nautical miles from our shoreline, is unacceptable and, therefore, it should be withdrawn immediately by the Chinese government," Jonathan Malaya, assistant director-general of the National Security Council, said. Two Philippine coast guard ships, ordered the 165m Chinese coast guard ship to withdraw from the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, 370kms stretch of water, Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarriela said. *—PTI*

TikTok says reports of potential sale to Musk are 'pure fiction'

BEIJING 14 JAN

TikTok has dismissed as "pure fiction" reports claiming that the Chinese government is considering allowing the sale of the platform to Elon Musk so it can continue operating in the United States.

Bloomberg News and The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday that Chinese officials have discussed allowing the sale to the Tesla and SpaceX CEO to avoid a ban scheduled to take effect on Sunday unless China-based owner ByteDance sells off TikTok's US operations.

While Beijing officials would "strongly prefer" that TikTok remains under the control of Beijing-based ByteDance, senior Chinese officials have begun to debate "contingency plans", Bloomberg said.

The Bloomberg report, which also cited unnamed people familiar with the matter, said one scenario being discussed would involve TikTok being combined into Musk's social media platform X.

Bloomberg said it was not clear how Musk, the world's richest person with an estimated net worth of more than USD400billion, would carry out the transaction or if he would need to sell some of his other assets to complete any sale. *—Agencies*

Mark Carney *PHOTO: XXX*

Mark Carney hints at potential PM run in Canada

PALM DESERT, 14 JAN

Former central banker Mark Carney has suggested he may run for the leadership of Canada's Liberal Party following Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's resignation on January 6, amid dwindling support for his government. In an appearance on Jon Stewart's The Daily Show, Carney, 59, described himself as an outsider with significant economic experience. He highlighted his track record, including steering Canada through the 2008 financial crisis and managing the UK's economy during Brexit.

Carney's main rival for the Liberal leadership is ex-Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, whose recent resignation triggered Trudeau's departure. The political landscape is challenging, with growing concerns over the economy as Canadians struggle with stagnant wages and rising housing costs. Carney emphasised the need for immediate action on these pressing issues.

With a potential no-confidence vote looming after Parliament resumes on 24 March, polls indicate the Liberals' chances of winning the next election are slim, trailing the Conservatives significantly. *—PTI*

'RAPED IN FRONT OF HIS SON'

Author Neil Gaiman accused of sexual assault by 3 women

NEW YORK, 14 JAN

Multiple women have accused British author Neil Gaiman of sexual assault in a New York Magazine cover story, months after initial allegations emerged against him.

Scarlett Pavlovich, one of the women who came forth with accusations of assault, met Gaiman's ex-wife American singer Amanda Palmer in New Zealand and soon agreed to babysit the couple's five-year-old child. According to Pavlovich, he encouraged her to have a bath in a bathtub when they first met and shortly after joined her in the tub without her consent and sexually assaulted her. According to Variety, Gaiman denied all allegations against him . Eventually, Pavlovich signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) and was paid USD 9,200 in nine separate payments for her babysitting services.

Another accuser, Caroline, also signed an NDA with Gaiman. She worked as a caretaker and babysitter on Gaiman's property in New York and the two started an intimate relationship after Caroline's husband left her in 2017.

She alleged that in December 2021, the author's business manager offered her USD5,000 to sign an NDA and move off the property, however, she asked for USD300,000 and Gaiman agreed. Kendra Stout, another woman who claimed Gaiman assaulted her, was 18 years old when she first met him at a book signing and their relationship turned physical three years later. She alleged that Gaiman raped her in 2007 after she explicitly told him she did not want to engage in the act due to a urinary tract infection. *— The Dawn*

Bezos' space firm attempts new rocket launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, 14 JAN

Blue Origin is set to attempt another launch of its colossal New Glenn rocket as early as Tuesday, following the cancellation of its inaugural flight due to ice accumulation in essential plumbing systems. The 320-foot New Glenn was scheduled to take off before dawn on Monday with a prototype satellite on board. However, ice formed in a purge line for a unit that powers some of the rocket's hydraulic systems, and launch controllers ran out of time to resolve the issue, according to the company.

The test flight faced additional delays due to rough seas, which jeopardised the planned landing of the first-stage booster on a floating platform in the Atlantic Ocean. "No matter what happens," he said this weekend, "we're going to pick ourselves up and keep going." *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Adani Group stocks soar; Adani Power surges 20%

Sensex climbs 169 points, Nifty rises 90 points

NEW DELHI, 31 OCT

Adani group stocks were in heavy demand on Tuesday and ended the day in the positive territory, with Adani Power surging nearly 20 per cent, bouncing back after declining from previous day's decline.

Shares of Adani Power zoomed 19.77 per cent, Adani Green Energy soared 13.22 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions surged 12.06 per cent, Adani Enterprises rallied 7.12 per cent, Adani Total Gas jumped 6.52 per cent and NDTV shot up 5.63 per cent on the BSE.

The stock of Adani Ports climbed 4.77 per cent, Ambuja Cements went up 4.66 per cent, ACC (4.65 per cent), Sanghi Industries (3.85 per cent), and Adani Wilmar (1.71 per cent).

The combined market valuation of all 11 group firms stood at Rs 12,51,029.2 crore.

All Adani group stocks had ended lower on Monday's trade in line with weak trend in equities.

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday after four days of sharp decline.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 169.62 points to settle at 76,499.63. The NSE Nifty went up 90.10 points to 23,176.05.

SENSEX, NIFTY RECOVER AFTER 4-DAY SLIDE

The benchmark indices, Sensex and Nifty, made a strong recovery in early trading on Tuesday following four consecutive days of decline, supported by value buying at lower levels and positive trends in Asian markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 449.48 points, reaching 76,779.49, while the NSE Nifty increased by 141.25 points to hit 23,227.20.

Over the past four trading sessions, the BSE Sensex had experienced a heavy drop of 1,869.1 points, or 2.39 per cent. Among the top gainers in the blue-chip pack were NTPC, Zomato, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, Adani Ports, and Bajaj Finance. However, HCL Technologies faced a decline of more than 9 per cent after disappointing earnings for the December quarter.

While the IT company reported a 5.54 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,591 crore, market experts noted that the figures and future guidance did not meet expectations. "While HCLT's 3Q numbers and 4Q guidance were underwhelming," said Shaji Nair, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. Other laggards from the 30-share pack included Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Consultancy Services, and Nestle.

In regional markets, Seoul, Shanghai, and Hong Kong showed gains, although Tokyo's market reported losses. US markets had a mixed performance on Monday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) sold equities worth Rs 4,892.84 crore on the previous day. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, suggested a possible near-term bounce back, although its sustainability remains uncertain. —*PTI*

Rupee settles 8p higher at 86.62 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

The rupee rebounded from its lowest-ever level and settled 8 paise higher at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday as the American currency retreated from record high. Some recovery in domestic equity markets after the release of macroeconomic numbers also supported the Indian currency even though it remained under pressure due to elevated crude oil prices and continuous outflow of foreign funds. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.57 and touched the intra-day high of 86.45 before closing for the day at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 8 paise from its previous close. —*PTI*

Gold falls marginally to ₹80,580 per 10gm

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Gold prices slipped Rs 80 to Rs 80,580 per 10 grams, bringing an end to its five-day winning streak in the national capital on Tuesday amid a weak global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Monday, the precious metal had closed at Rs 80,660 per 10 grams. Silver also fell sharply by Rs 1,300 to Rs 91,700 per kg on Tuesday on slack demand from industrial units and coin makers. The white metal settled at Rs 93,000 per kg in the previous session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity fell Rs 80 to Rs 80,180 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 80,260 per 10 grams. Additionally, gold contracts for February delivery fell Rs 16 to Rs 78,150 per 10 grams in the futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). However, silver traded flat at USD 30.32 per ounce in the Asian market hours.—*PTI*

Quadrant Future Tek shares surge 29% in debut trade

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Shares of Quadrant Future Tek Ltd on Tuesday listed with a premium of 29 per cent against the issue price of Rs 290. The stock made its debut with a surge of 28.96 per cent at Rs 374 on the BSE. It further zoomed 54.74 per cent to Rs 448.75. At the NSE, it climbed 27.58 per cent to Rs 370 in opening trade. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 1,795 crore. The initial public offer of Quadrant Future Tek Ltd received 185.82 times subscription on the final day of share sale on Thursday, mirroring strong investors participation. The initial share sale had a price band of Rs 275-290 per share. The IPO had a fresh issue of up to Rs 290 crore with no offer of sale component—*PTI*

JLR and Tata strengthen ties for connected car tech

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Jaguar Land Rover and Tata Communications have strengthened their collaboration for connected car technologies, the companies said in a joint statement on Tuesday. As part of the enhanced collaboration, Tata Communications will offer its MOVE platform to enhance JLR's connected vehicle ecosystem, transforming the driving experience for customers worldwide. The partnership will empower JLR's next-generation software-defined vehicles with continuous connectivity and access to intelligent services even in the remotest locations across 120 countries, the auto maker said in a statement. The latest tie-up is an extension of their existing partnership to future-proof the carmaker's digital transformation. Leveraging the MOVE platform, JLR's upcoming medium-sized SUVs built on the new electric modular architecture (EMA) will seamlessly transition between mobile networks and operators, enabling non-stop access to personalised connected services, such as media streaming, it said. —*PTI*

FUEL AND POWER PRICES

Wholesale inflation up 2.37% in Dec, RBI rate decision likely

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Wholesale price inflation rose to 2.37 per cent in December 2024, driven by increasing prices of non-food articles, manufactured goods, and fuel and power, despite a slight easing in food item prices, according to government data released on Tuesday.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation stood at 1.89 per cent in November 2024 and 0.86 per cent in December 2023. Comparatively, it was recorded at 2.75 per cent in October.

Food item inflation eased slightly to 8.47 per cent in December, down from 8.63 per cent in November, with prominent reductions in the prices of cereals, pulses, and wheat. However, vegetable inflation remained elevated, soaring to 28.65 per cent, with potato prices skyrocketing by 93.20 per cent and onions at 16.81 per cent .

Non-food articles, particularly oilseeds, witnessed a rise in inflation to 2.46 per cent, reversing a decline of 0.98% per cent in November. The fuel and power segment recorded a deflation of 3.79 per cent, an improvement from a 5.83 per cent deflation the previous month, while manufactured goods saw inflation increase to 2.14 per cent from 2.00 per cent.

Rahul Agrawal, Senior Economist at ICRA, attributed the rise in WPI primarily to increases in fuel and power prices and primary non-food articles, which collectively contributed 42 basis points to the overall increase. With global commodity prices on the rise in January 2025, sustained pressures are anticipated due to a weaker Indian rupee.

ICRA projects WPI inflation to rise further to 3 per cent in January 2025, with expectations of a 2.5 per cent average over the current fiscal year and 3-3.3 per cent in FY26. —*PTI*

Insurers eye tax benefits, incentives in Union Budget

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Insurers are seeking tax benefits for buyers and incentives for selling policies in their wishlist for the upcoming Union Budget as the country is projected to emerge as the G20's fastest-growing insurance market.

In 2023-24, the country's insurance penetration was at 3.7 per cent compared to 4 per cent in 2022-23, according to Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai). The insurance penetration for the life insurance industry marginally declined to 2.8 per cent during 2023-24 from 3 per cent in the preceding year. The penetration with respect to the non-life insurance industry remained the same at 1 per cent during 2023-24 as in 2022-23. India is expected to lead G20 with an average 7.3 per cent premium growth over 2025-29, a Swiss Re report released on Tuesday said. Neha Parikh, Vice President and Sector Head - Financial Sector Ratings at ICRA Ltd, said that given the weak solvency position of the PSU general insurance companies, the announcement related to budgetary allocation for their recapitalisation will be positive.

Mayank Gupta, Co-founder and COO at Zopper, was of the opinion that addressing the ailing insurance penetration problem by incentivising the industry participants to bring new-to-insurance customers into their fold could be one such strategy to expedite the coverage of larger populations under insurance. —*PTI*

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman PHOTO: X

DOMESTIC TRAFFIC AT 15.5M

Domestic aviation sector to face ₹2,000-3,000 cr loss in FY25: Report

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Indian civil aviation sector is anticipated to incur a net loss of Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 crore in the current and following financial year, as supply chain disruptions and engine-related issues are likely to persist, according to a recent report by rating agency ICRA.

The report, released on Tuesday, noted that domestic air passenger traffic reached 15.3 million in December, reflecting a 7.3 per cent increase from November's 14.25 million. Year-on-year, this represents a growth of 10.8 per cent and is approximately 17.5 per cent higher than pre-Covidlevels recorded in December 2019. Additionally, airlines improved their capacity deployment in December 2024 by 7.5 per cent compared to December 2023, and by 3.8 per cent relative to November 2024.

ICRA provided a stable outlook for the Indian aviation industry, forecasting moderate growth in domestic air passenger traffic and a relatively stable cost environment in FY25. The industry experienced enhanced pricing power in FY24, demonstrated by increased yields—exceeding pre-Covid levels—and a positive revenue per available seat kilometre to cost per available seat kilometre (RASK-CASK) spread. However, the growth momentum in air passenger traffic witnessed in FY2024 is projected to taper slightly to 7-10 per cent in FY2025, down from 13 per cent in FY2024, amidst a high base effect and reduced passenger traffic during the first half of FY2025 due to extreme heat waves and other weather-related disruptions. Airlines may face pressure on yields as they seek to maintain adequate passenger load factors (PLF). International passenger traffic for Indian carriers is expected to witness a robust growth of 15-20 per cent in FY2025. Looking forward to FY2025 and FY2026, ICRA predicts that the industry will experience a net loss between Rs 20-30 billion, as ongoing supply chain challenges and engine failures continue to impact operational capacity. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

- International passenger traffic for Indian carriers is expected to witness a robust growth of 15-20 per cent in FY2025

Govt: Will double turmeric production to 20L T in 5 years

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The newly constituted National Turmeric Board aims to promote international markets for turmeric and enhance production to approximately 2 million tonnes within the next five years, announced Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday.

In unveiling the Board, Goyal emphasised the significance of turmeric, often referred to as the 'golden spice', noting that India currently contributes 70 per cent of global turmeric production. "We are looking to double the production in the next five years," he stated at a press conference.

Established in October, the National Turmeric Board is dedicated to advancing the growth of turmeric and its products across the country. India holds the title of the largest producer, consumer, and exporter of turmeric worldwide. In the 2022-23 agricultural year, turmeric was cultivated across an area of 324,000 hectares, yielding 1.16 million tonnes. —*PTI*

64%prefer EV as next vehicle: TCS

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

A recent global study conducted by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) reveals that more than 60 per cent of consumers worldwide, including those in India, are likely to consider purchasing an electric vehicle (EV) as their next car. However, 60 per cent of respondents identified charging infrastructure as a significant challenge.

The TCS Future-Ready eMobility Study 2025 surveyed over 1,300 anonymous participants from countries including the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia. It found that 56 per cent would be willing to pay up to USD 40,000 (approximately Rs 35 lakh) for an EV.

PHOTO: PTI

The study also highlighted perspectives from manufacturers, with 90 per cent stating that advancements in battery technology would greatly enhance the range and charging speed of EVs. However, 74 per cent of manufacturers recognised charging infrastructure as a primary barrier to EV market expansion.

From the consumer viewpoint, while 60 per cent of respondents cited charging infrastructure as a major hurdle, 64 per cent indicated they were likely to opt for an EV as their next vehicle. Notably, 72 per cent of consumers in the US expressed a strong inclination towards purchasing an EV.

In terms of acceptable range, 41 per cent of participants believed that a single charge should offer between 200 to 300 miles. —*PTI*

Palm oil imports slump in Dec

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India witnessed a significant decline in palm oil imports in December 2024 as more competitively priced soybean oil from South America gained popularity among consumers. According to data released by the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), imports of soybean oil surged to 420,000 tonnes, a considerable increase from 152,650 tonnes in December 2023.

The shift in preference comes amid tightening supplies of Malaysian palm oil, prompting buyers to opt for the cheaper South American alternative. SEA Executive Director BV Mehta noted that substantial price discounts on soybean oil are driving rapid consumption, which is alleviating the tightness in palm oil supplies.

PHOTO: PTI

In December 2024, the market share of palm oil dropped to 42 per cent, while refined oils, including soybean and sunflower oil, accounted for 58 per cent of the total imports. Crude palm oil imports plummeted by 47.32 per cent, totalling 326,587 tonnes, compared to 620,020 tonnes last year. Imports of RBD palmolein also fell by 25.16 per cent to 165,290 tonnes, and crude palm kernel oil imports decreased to 8,298 tonnes from 22,500 tonnes.

Meanwhile, sunflower oil imports experienced a modest rise, reaching 264,836 tonnes from 260,850 tonnes in December 2023. Overall, total vegetable oil imports dipped slightly to 1.23 million tonnes, down from 1.31 million tonnes the previous year. —*PTI*

'LONG HOURS LEAD TO BURNOUT'

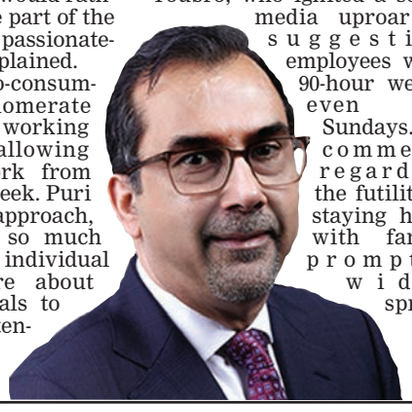
ITC chairman promotes employee well-being over 90-hour work week

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

ITC Ltd Chairman Sanjiv Puri has addressed the ongoing controversy surrounding extensive work hours, asserting that it is more critical for employees to align with the company's broader vision than to focus on the number of hours worked.

In an interview with PTI, Puri illustrated his point using the analogy of workers constructing a castle: while a mason might describe his work as laying bricks, others may see it as building a wall, but a few should recognise they are creating a castle. "It is that vision that workers should have," he emphasised, stating his preference for not imposing a fixed number of hours at ITC. "We would rather like people to be part of the journey... and feel passionately involved," he explained.

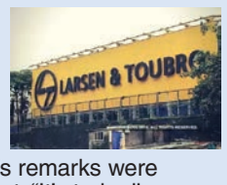
The cigarettes-to-consumer-goods conglomerate offers a flexible working environment, allowing employees to work from home two days a week. Puri highlighted this approach, stating, "It's not so much about monitoring individual hours... it's more about enabling individuals to actualise their potential."



Puri's comments follow remarks from SN Subrahmanyan, Chairman of engineering giant Larsen & Toubro, who ignited a social media uproar by suggesting employees work 90-hour weeks, even on Sundays. His comments regarding the futility of staying home with family prompted widespread debate over work-life balance.

Critics, including RPG Group Chairman Harsh Goenka, expressed concern that long hours lead to burnout rather than success. Subrahmanyan's views, along with comments from other prominent business figures about work-life balance, have drawn attention to differing philosophies on productivity in India, echoing similar discussions in China surrounding the demanding 996 work culture. As the debate continues, Puri maintains that empowering employees and fostering a shared vision remains at the heart of ITC's philosophy. —*PTI*

L&T's HR Head defends 90-hr work week row



Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Head HR Sonica Muraleedharan defended Chairman SN Subrahmanyan after his remarks about wanting employees to work for 90 hours a week invoked a massive debate across the country. Muraleedharan said that the chairman's remarks were "misinterpreted" and taken out of context. "It's truly disheartening to see how the words of our MD & Chairman, SN Subrahmanyan have been taken out of context, leading to misunderstandings and unnecessary criticism. Having been present during the internal address, I can confidently state that SNS never implied or mandated 90-hour work weeks," she said in a post on LinkedIn. —*Agencies*

In-form stars to light up K'taka & Haryana Hazare SFs

VADODARA, 14 JAN

Seeking a break in IPL after going unsold in mega auction, Karnataka skipper Mayank Agarwal will look to extend his incredible run of form in the Vijay Hazare Trophy when he leads his team out in their semifinal against defending champions Haryana in Vadodara on Wednesday. If four-time winners Karnataka have the likes of Agarwal, Shreyas Gopal and Vijaykumar Vyshak in their ranks, Haryana will be banking on in-form players such as Nishant Sindhu, Anshul Kamboj and Ankit Kumar. While a return to the national fold may not seem realistic at this stage of his career, 33-year-old Agarwal would want to impress the IPL franchises with a strong finish to the tournament in which he has already amassed four hundreds against Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Hyderabad and Nagaland. Apart from the sensational Karun Nair, Agarwal is the only other batter to have aggregated over 600 runs in the season so far. The veteran opener has so far scored 619 runs at an excellent average of 123.80, while striking the ball at a rate of 109.75.

PHOTO:ANI

Gill to join Punjab's Ranji game vs Karnataka

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India's top-order batter Shubman Gill is set to join Punjab for the team's sixth-round Ranji Trophy match against Karnataka in Bengaluru on 23 January, days after a below-par show in the Test series against Australia. Gill had scored just 93 runs from three matches in Australia at an average of 18.60, with a highest score of 31. India lost the five-match series 1–3. During the series, head coach Gautam Gambhir had spoken about the need for senior players to show up in Ranji games. The BCCI brass also insisted that stars should not opt out of domestic marquee events. *—PTI*

Canada Soccer ropes in Stoney as head coach

OTTAWA, 14 JAN

Former England captain Casey Stoney said she's confident she can move Canada past the drone spying scandal that shook the women's national team at the Olympics last summer. Stoney was named head coach of Canada's women on Monday. She signed a three-year contract with Canada Soccer that runs through the 2027 Women's World Cup, with an option for 2028. Stoney takes over the team from Bev Priestman, who was fired in the wake a drone surveillance scandal at last year's Olympics. "It's about now what we can do moving forward, how we can improve the team," Stoney said. "I'm here to... make sure that the players are completely focused on what their job is, which is to win football matches." *—PTI*

Millwall sets up FA Cup tie with Leeds

LONDON, 14 JAN

Ra'ess Bangura-Williams scored 10 minutes into his professional debut as Millwall beat Dagenham & Redbridge 3–0 on Monday to set up an FA Cup fourth-round tie with Leeds United. The 20-year-old midfielder signed a new contract only last week and was given his debut with Millwall 2–0 up and 15 minutes remaining. With almost his first touch of the ball he cut in from the left and slotted the ball under the advancing goalkeeper from an angle. Mihailo Ivanovic scored in the first half and Casper De Norre made it 2–0 with 20 minutes left. The fourth-round ties are preliminary scheduled for 8 February. *—PTI*

Sindhu, Satwik have Super Open

They reached 2nd round of India Super Open

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

PV Sindhu *PHOTO:PTI*

PV Sindhu and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the USD 950,000 India Open Super 750 badminton tournament on Tuesday, although both faced tough challenges.

Sindhu, returning after a break due to her wedding, overcame a rusty start to defeat world No. 24 Sung Shuo Yun of Chinese Taipei 21-14, 22-20. "After a long break, it's always difficult to find rhythm, but I am happy to win in straight games," Sindhu said. She will next face Japan's Manami Suizu.

In men's doubles, Satwik and Chirag, seeded seventh, fought hard to beat Malaysia's world No. 7 duo Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee 23-21, 19-21, 21-16. Despite losing the second game, they sealed the win in the decider. "They have improved immensely, but we're happy to have come back in the third game," Chirag said. Kiran George, another standout, saved three match points to defeat Japan's world No. 25 Yushi Tanaka 21-19, 14-21, 27-25. "I kept my composure and pulled through," Kiran said. Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila also progressed in mixed doubles with a 8-21, 21-19, 21-17 win over Chinese Taipei's Chen Cheng Kuan and Hsu Yin-Hui. Former national champions Ashwini Bhat and Shikha Gautam won their women's doubles match 22-20, 21-18. However, there was disappointment for the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who lost 21-23, 19-21 to Japan's Arisa Igarashi and Ayako Sakuramoto. *—PTI*

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty. *PHOTO: PTI*

BCCI to decide Gambhir's fate after CT

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Gautam Gambhir's position as head coach will be "revaluated" on the basis of India's Champions Trophy (CT) performance next month amid concerns that there is discontent in the dressing room due to his push to end the long-prevalent "superstar culture" in the team.

Since Gambhir took over in July last year, India lost six out of 10 Tests and also a bilateral ODI series in Sri Lanka. The results have left Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's international future in significant disarray, thanks to their own poor form.

But Gambhir's position has also become slightly shaky. Adding to the drama is his speculated rift with prominent players during the Border-Gavaskar Test series in Australia which India lost 1–3.

"If India doesn't do well in the Champions Trophy, the head coach's position could become untenable. Yes, his contract runs till the 2027 World Cup, but the process of evaluation continues.

"Sport is result-oriented and till now, Gambhir hasn't given any tangible results," a senior BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

There has already been a review of the team's performance in Australia by the BCCI. It is understood that Gambhir and senior players are not on the same page on team culture. *—PTI*

Bumrah ICC Men's Player of Month

DUBAI, 14 JAN

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday named ICC Men's Player of the Month for December 2024 after his sensational performance during the recent tour of Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Leading India's attack single-handedly, Bumrah kept Australian batsmen under intense pressure, claiming 22 wickets in three Tests in December at an outstanding average of 14.22.

Bumrah ended with 32 wickets in the five-match series concluded on 5 January. The first match was played in November. His match-winning contributions included a nine-wicket haul in Brisbane and a five-wicket display in Melbourne as he edged out Australian skipper Pat Cummins and South African Dane Paterson for the award, the ICC said.

Bumrah also reached a significant milestone, becoming the first bowler to take 200 Test wickets at an average below 20.

Bumrah's brilliance was evident from the very start, with a standout performance in Adelaide. His four-wicket haul was instrumental in minimising Australia's lead in the first innings, keeping India within striking distance. He followed this up with a sensational display in Brisbane, where his six wickets in the first innings dismantled Australia's batting order. Bumrah added three more scalps in the second innings to complete a 9-wicket match haul. *—PTI*

Rohit joins Mumbai Ranji team practice

Embattled India captain Rohit Sharma practised with the Mumbai team at the Wankhede stadium on Tuesday as the side geared up for the resumption of Ranji Trophy from 23 January. The 37-year-old, who endured a horror run with the bat in the national team's tour of Australia recently, took part in a morning practice session at the stadium. The past few weeks have been tumultuous for Rohit. He managed just 31 runs across three Tests during his time Down Under and was forced to drop himself from the final Test in Sydney. *—PTI*

India continued their dominance in Turn 3, adding three more points with a 'Dream Run.' *PHOTO: PTI*

India beat S Korea with 175-18 score

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Indian women's team delivered a spectacular performance in their opening match of the Kho Kho World Cup, registering a commanding 175-18 victory over South Korea at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium on Tuesday.

Right from the start, India showcased their dominance with a combination of aggressive 'Dream Runs' and solid defensive strategies. Chaithra B, Meeru, and skipper Priyanka Ingle set the tone for the team with consecutive 'Dream Runs,' earning crucial points. Their early efforts neutralized South Korea's 10 touch-points from the first turn, putting India in a commanding position.

With the momentum in their favor, India launched a relentless attack in the second turn, spearheaded by Nasreen Shaikh, Priyanka, and Reshma Rathod. In just 90 seconds, they scored three 'ALL OUT' victories against South Korea, pushing the score to 24. India extended their lead even further with a fourth 'ALL OUT' just 18 seconds later, moving the score to 22 points.

Reshma Rathod was exceptional, registering six touch-points, while Meenu contributed a stellar 12 points through 'Other Dives,' significantly boosting the team's total. By the end of Turn 2, India had eliminated 16 batches, leading 94-10.

India continued their dominance in Turn 3, adding three more points with a 'Dream Run.' South Korea struggled to keep pace, scoring only eight points in the second innings of Turn 3. India's unrelenting control was evident as they completed a massive 157-point win, never allowing their opponents to settle into a rhythm. *—PTI*

Indian men defeat Brazil in Kho Kho

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Indian men's team outclassed Brazil 64-34 in a dominant display of skill and strategy to move closer to the knock-out stage of the Kho Kho World Cup here on Tuesday.

The match, which kept the spectators on the edge of their seats at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, saw India proving their mettle.

Brazil started well in their attack, getting 16 points to their name, but India came back strong. India earned two points during a 'Dream Run' that kept the Brazilians on their toes. Turn 2 was very impressive for the 'Men in Blue', as they upped the ante while attacking the Brazilians.

Rokeson Singh, Pabani Sabar and Aditya Ganpule were the main aggressors for India, as they led the team to an impressive 36 points at the end of Turn 2. But just when it looked like they were running away with the same, Brazil fought back in Turn 3. Brazil piled the pressure on India in Turn 3, led by the likes of Mauro Pinto, Joel Rodrigues and especially Matheus Costa, who scored six touch-points. They fought their way back, scoring an impressive 34 points in reply to India's 38, setting up an exciting final seven minutes of the match. As expected, India bounced back in Turn 4. *—PTI*

BOXING CHAMPIONSHIP

Jamwal bags gold, Services retain team

BAREILLY, 14 JAN

Himachal Pradesh pugilist Abhinash Jamwal capped his dream run in the tournament with a gold medal in the welterweight (60–65kg) category, while Services retained team title for the third consecutive time in the men's National Boxing Championship here.

Jamwal, who had earlier defeated reigning champion Shiva Thapa and former youth world champion Vanshaj Kumar, outclassed Amit of the Railways in the final to secure the gold.

Meanwhile, Services boxers Sachin Siwach and Lakshya Chahar clinched gold medals in the lightweight (55–60kg) and light heavyweight (75–80kg) divisions, respectively. Siwach beat Nikhil of Punjab, while Chahar won against Dhruv Singh of Delhi in the final.In the bantamweight (50–55kg) category, Manish Rathore overcame Services' Pawan Bartwal to claim gold. *—PTI*

India eyes clean sweep in final ODI vs Ire

RAJKOT, 14 JAN

A dominant India will fancy their chances of completing a clean sweep of the women's ODI series against Ireland in the third and final match here on Wednesday, having recorded two convincing wins in the preceding games.

With another power-packed batting performance, the Indian team will be aiming to continue their impressive run and finish on a high note.

Pratika Rawal, after scoring her third half-century in just four innings, will be eager to translate her start into a maiden hundred.

Her blistering opening partnerships with skipper Smriti Mandhana have been the biggest takeaway of the series.

Pratika Rawal, after scoring her third half-century in just four innings, will be eager to translate her start into a maiden hundred *PHOTO: X*

The duo added 156 runs for the first wicket in their previous outing, marking their third century-plus stand in five innings.

Mandhana's consistency at the top continues to be a major highlight for India as the flamboyant left-hander has carried on her form across formats from the West Indies series.

Harleen Deol, who initially struggled for momentum, found her rhythm later in the innings, scoring an important 89.

Thanks to Jemimah Rodrigues, who displayed patience and composure before accelerating in the final stages of the innings, India smashed their highest-ever ODI total of 370/5 in the last game.

Promoted to No. 4 in Harmanpreet Kaur's absence, Rodrigues showed maturity after getting a reprieve on 34, and it took her just 28 balls to reach her second fifty.

"It was an added responsibility... Initially I showed a lot of patience, which was again a big positive for me because it was important for me to spend time there to get those runs," Rodrigues said. *—PTI*

MEDALS LOSE LAYER

Defective Paris Olympic medals to be replaced

PARIS, 14 JAN

Some of the medals from the Paris Olympics seem to be quickly losing their shine.

The French mint told The Associated Press on Tuesday that it is replacing a number of medals from the 2024 Paris Games and Paralympics after athletes complained that they have already deteriorated — with some posting pictures on social media.

The Monnaie de Paris declined to say how many medals have been returned, but French website La Lettre put the number at over 100. Contacted by the AP, the French Olympic committee and the IOC also would not reveal figures.

In total, the French mint produced 5,084 medals for the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Monnaie de Paris will replace all damaged medals at the athletes' request during the first quarter of 2025.

French swimmer Yohann Ndoye-Brouard posted images of their medals on social media, describing them as looking like "crocodile skin" *PHOTO: X*

Parisian jewelry house Chaumet designed the medals, which were part of the Games' lasting legacy. A hexagonal, polished chunk of iron taken from the iconic Eiffel Tower was embedded in each gold, silver and bronze medal.

But concerns about their quality emerged before the Games had even ended last summer when American skateboarder Nyjah Huston posted a video showing how quickly his bronze medal had deteriorated. Many other athletes have since also complained.

French swimmers Yohann Ndoye-Brouard and Clément Secchi recently posted images of their medals on social media, describing them as looking like "crocodile skin," or dating back to 1924.

Manu to get 'deteriorating' Paris Olympics medals replaced

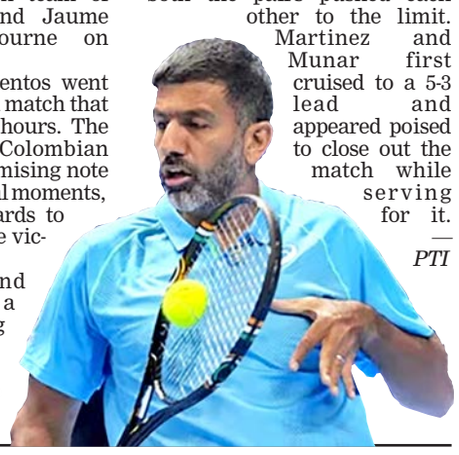
India's star pistol shooter Manu Bhaker is likely to get her two Paris Olympics Bronze medals replaced by identical models. It has been learnt that the colour of Bhaker's medals has "come off" and they "have been in that state" for a long while now. *—PTI*

Bopanna, Barrientos exit Australia Open

MELBOURNE, 14 JAN

Former world number one Rohan Bopanna and his new Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos bowed out of the Australian Open men's doubles event with an opening-round loss to the Spanish team of Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar in Melbourne on Tuesday.

Bopanna and Barrientos went down 5–7, 6–7 (5) in a match that lasted close to two hours. The 14th-seeded Indo-Colombian pair began on a promising note but faltered in crucial moments, allowing the Spaniards to capitalise and secure victory.

Bopanna and Barrientos got off to a solid start, holding serve comfortably in the initial games. However, the Spanish pair gradually gained momentum, showcasing consistency from the baseline and tactical net play. The decisive moment came late in the set when Martinez and Munar earned a crucial break to take the opener.

In a roller-coaster second set, both the pairs pushed each other to the limit. Martinez and Munar first cruised to a 5-3 lead and appeared poised to close out the match while serving for it. *—PTI*